

## COMMERCIAL STRIP REDEVELOPMENT

***Stop the spread of strip commercial zones lining our roadways and begin to reclaim the strip into more contained sub-centers with shared driveways and parking, higher quality landscaping and architecture, and a mix of adjacent uses.***



### Zip Up the Strip

A common complaint at the public workshops was the ugliness and traffic congestion created by strip development.

#### **How did people define the strip?**

- dependence on cars for every movement
- traffic jams, too many lights and driveways
- asphalt landscape of oversized parking lots
- big pole and wall signs in clashing colors
- lack of coordinated landscaping
- cheap-looking boxy architecture
- every town starts to look alike



But people also like the convenience of discount stores, supermarkets, and popular restaurants. How can we accommodate the larger scale and convenience of highway business uses without having strip zones destroy the distinctive character of our communities?

**First, put a firm limit on the length of any commercial district**, and instead allow any necessary commercial expansion in greater depth. In this sense, shopping plazas and regional malls are preferable to long, narrow strip zones because they concentrate commercial uses and encourage shared parking and walking between stores. Commercial districts look and function best when larger “big box” stores and parking lots are placed to the rear with a row of smaller, more attractive storefronts set close to the road. This screens the parking and establishes a more traditional and walkable street frontage.

**Then, transform the strip into a commercial boulevard with limited left hand turns.** Multiple driveways for each use lead to traffic back-ups, more accidents, and the eventual need for expensive road widenings. Clustered commercial districts allow shared entrance drives spaced more widely apart and internal service roads to connect nearby uses and parking lots. Every site plan is an opportunity to upgrade the landscaping with street trees and coordinate access along the public frontage.

## Seven Steps to Retrofit the Strip

Communities can begin to reclaim existing shopping strips outside village and town centers by agreeing to a long-term redesign program that gradually transforms strips into mixed use sub-centers with each successive site plan application:



1. Restrict further development of outlying highway frontage and limit existing commercial districts to under 1/2 mile in length;
2. Consolidate entrances along the road to a few main driveways with internal service streets based on a block system to connect businesses in between;
3. Help unify the streetscape with continuous street trees, high quality landscaping, and, where possible, planted medians to prevent unlimited left hand turns;
4. Build sidewalks and crosswalks throughout the area to create connections to shared parking, public transportation, walking between stores and to nearby housing;



5. Fill in the fronts of large parking lots with small, closely spaced or attached storefronts to build a street frontage with courtyard parking behind;
6. With buildings up front, attractive architecture, wall signs and sidewalks can be featured along the frontage, not parking lots and pole signs;
7. Encourage a mix of housing and other uses adjacent to the shopping to begin to build a walkable neighborhood rather than a strictly commercial driving district.



## Rebuilding a Commercial Center Step by Step



## FROM CONGESTION TO CIRCULATION

***Tame traffic congestion with a three-prong approach: strictly limit access driveways along major roads, disperse vehicles on interconnected secondary street systems, and mix land uses closer together to encourage alternatives to the automobile.***

Curing traffic congestion is hopeless task when every movement means getting into a car. Spread-out suburban development patterns require us to lug along 2,000 pounds of steel wherever we go, often wasting a half gallon of gas to pick up a quart of milk. The standard answer to congestion, adding more asphalt, has proven to just induce more traffic, so all too soon the wider roads are clogged again.

Uncontrolled access with multiple driveways along major roads leads to traffic tie-ups and more accidents caused by constant turning movements. The road from suburban congestion to smoother circulation involves a movement toward mixed land use patterns and the consistent application of “access management” strategies to keep traffic moving smoothly, increase safety, visually improve the roadway, and avoid expensive road expansion projects.

### Minimize Driveways on Major Roads



*Overly wide access drives allow unpredictable turning movements, often at unsafe speeds. One narrower entrance (24 feet for two-way) will slow entering vehicles and provide space for street trees and landscaping.*



*Paired one-way access drives cause multiple curb cuts too close together, lots of traffic conflict points, excessive breaks in the sidewalk, and repetitive enter/exit signs.*

- Limit access drives to at most one per parcel unless a traffic analysis or unique conditions fully justify another curb cut.
- Close excess entrances and narrow overly wide driveways during any new site plan approval.
- Share access with neighbors whenever possible.
- Place entrance at the edge of the parcel so driveways can be shared.

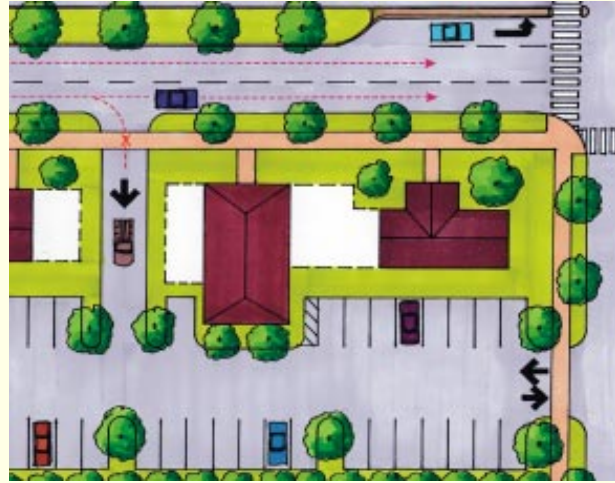
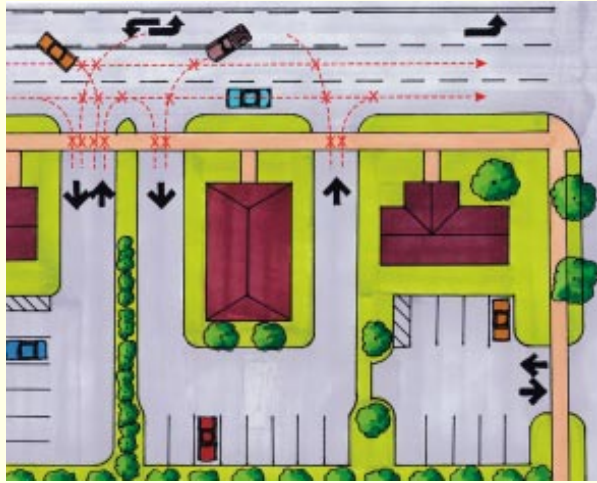


*A few uses, like gas stations on small sites, may need two driveways to provide through circulation, but third or fourth curb openings, especially those too near an intersection, should be closed and the front landscaped.*



*These businesses in Hyde Park share a narrow 16-foot entrance drive between the buildings and a common exit onto an existing side road, along with consistent stone walls and the bulk of the parking to the rear.*

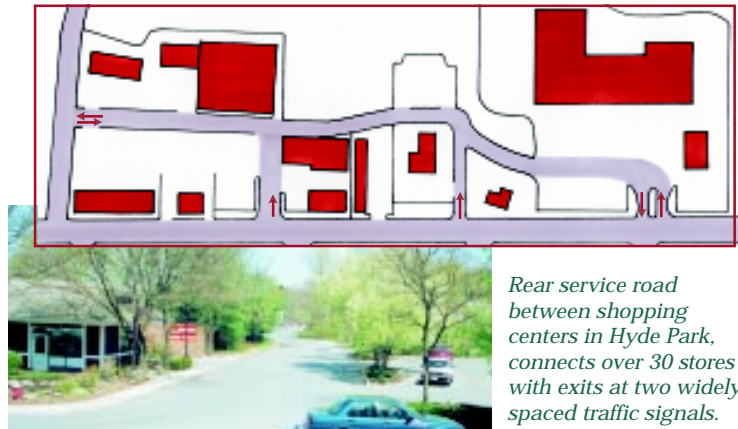
**Landscaped Medians** allow sheltered left hand turns, provide safe refuge for pedestrian crossings, and create beautiful boulevards. Approximately two-thirds of accidents involve left turns. Raised medians in suburban areas have significantly fewer accidents than central two-way left turn lanes or undivided arterials.



Center medians combined with shared access drives can ease congestion and dramatically reduce potential accident points (X). Fewer driveways also allow space for businesses to expand, creating a more continuous pedestrian-friendly frontage.

## Build Connections Between Sites

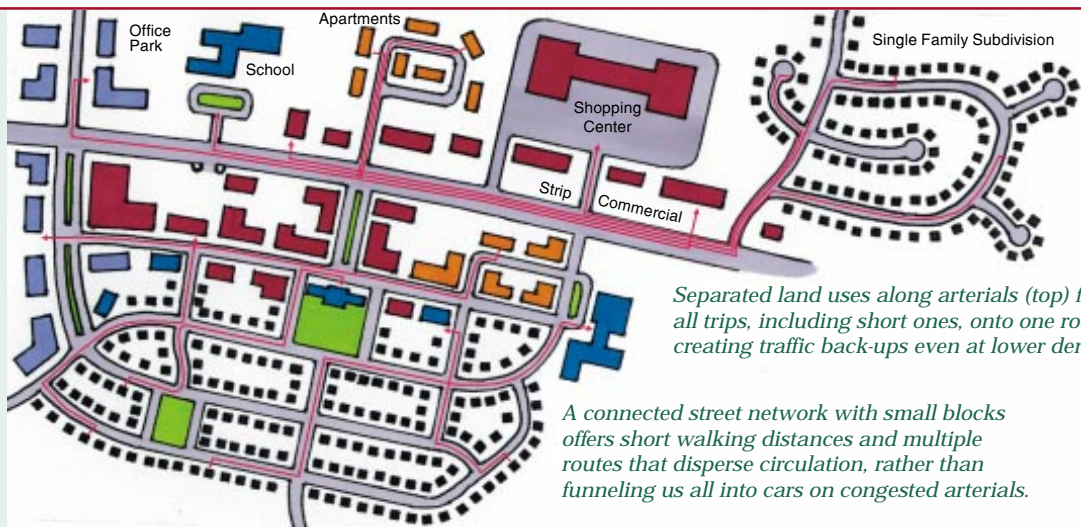
- Cluster buildings and develop in depth with common entrances and internal circulation.
- Link adjacent parking lots and build continuous service roads toward the rear of properties.
- Provide temporary stub drives to connect to adjacent parcels when they are developed.
- Locate structures and parking lots to facilitate secondary streets based on a block system.



Rear service road between shopping centers in Hyde Park, connects over 30 stores with exits at two widely spaced traffic signals.

## Compact, mixed use communities

with interconnected streets, sidewalks, and transit linkages are the best long-term solution for traffic congestion.



Separated land uses along arterials (top) force all trips, including short ones, onto one road, creating traffic back-ups even at lower densities.

A connected street network with small blocks offers short walking distances and multiple routes that disperse circulation, rather than funneling us all into cars on congested arterials.

## Sources:

Michael Leccese and Kathleen McCormick, *Charter of the New Urbanism* (Chapter 12), 2000  
Town of Rhinebeck, *Design Standards*, 1999